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AUTHOR Parsons, Michael H.
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ABSTRACT

The Appalachian Staff Development Consortium, comprised of three community colleges and the state college located in Appalachian Maryland, attempts to integrate staff development activities into the operational framework of the sponsoring agencies. The consortium, which is managed by a steering committee composed of one teaching faculty member and one instructional administrator from each of the member colleges, uses a management process which seeks to achieve targeted goals. Five management strategies or functions of the steering committee in this process include serving as: (1) linking agent--bringing together faculty from member institutions who have like interests, needs, or problems; (2) climate developer--creating an environment that is responsive to innovation and supportive of change; (3) information disseminator--keeping members aware of what is transpiring, providing faculty-based peer recognition, and developing among individual institutions a sense of identification with the consortium; (4) insularity reducer--insuring contact between the everyday concerns of the individual small rural colleges and the broader issues presented by the consortium through consulting, travel, and encouragement of specific projects; and (5) regional revitalizer--fostering personnel development through effective communication, long range planning, resource development, and evaluation. (MB)

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TARGETS OF OPPORTUNITY:

STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING A STAFF DEVELOPMENT CONSORTIUM

A Paper Commissioned for

The Northeast Regional Conference
of the
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Michael H. Parsons, Ed.D.
Acting Dean of Instructional Affairs
Hagerstown Junior College
Hagerstown, Maryland 21740

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Introduction

Staff development has become the cliche of the 1970's among community college educators. The decade has been characterized by enrollment plateauing and staff stabilization. The result has been the need to assist existing staff members in becoming more competent rather than searching for new staff. As indicated in a number of studies,[1] the current emphasis in staff development has been to alter the beliefs of the existing staff members about their institutions and thereby modify their behavior.

The emergence of staff development programs on community college campuses is relatively well along. Most institutions have some form of activity designed to increase the expertise or, at least, the enthusiasm of their personnel. The question which is gradually emerging is how does the program become integrated into ongoing institutional practice.[2] Unless the activities become a part of the institutional fabric, they will have, at least, a transitory impact.

The three community colleges and the state college located in Appalachian Maryland engaged staff development during the 1970's. As with most programs, the results varied. Over-all the institutions considered the process worthwhile and sought to expand its impact. One strategy that appeared worthy of exploration was the formation of a consortium. By so doing, the institutions could make their programs more cost effective as well as increase the diversity of the personnel involved in the development process. Further, by working through the Appalachian Regional Commission it would be possible to obtain funding for development activity. Therefore, in July 1977 the Appalachian Staff Development Consortium began operation.

The structural details of the consortium are described elsewhere.[3] Suffice it to say that the consortium has become an operational entity. It has fostered a broad range of activities and brought together personnel from diverse backgrounds in the cause of development. After 17 months of existence, the consortium is facing the same question that institutional programs face - how do you integrate the development activities into the operational framework of the sponsoring agency?

The purpose of this paper is to describe the role of the consortium steering committee in managing that integration. While the consortium approach to staff development appears to be a logical outgrowth of maturing staff development programs, its continued impact will depend upon its ability to foster the process of institutional renewal. What challenges face the steering committee?

Targets of Opportunity

The Appalachian Staff Development Consortium is managed by a steering committee composed of one teaching faculty member and one instructional administrator from each of the member colleges. The daily operation of the consortium is conducted by the Consortium Coordinator. The group meets monthly to assess the ongoing activities of the organization. After 17 months of operation, a general theory of management is emerging. Durzo, in describing the operation of a consortium, states: "...(institutions) often cannot stipulate the manner in which they will avail themselves of consortium services. In such a setting, (the board) would be required to work with various 'targets of opportunity' as they arise from the activities and needs of the member institutions."[4] The Appalachian experience

reinforces the generalization made by Durzo.

As a "target" becomes visible, the steering committee needs to select an appropriate strategy to take advantage of the opportunity. A review of the activities engaged in by the steering committee during the past 17 months indicates that there are five strategies which comprise an emergent management process. They engage emergent needs as well as modify institutional practice. As a result, they are integrative forces. It is worthwhile, now, to examine the five strategies.

Management Strategies

The first strategy is that of linking agent. It is important that the steering committee and its agent, the coordinator, bring together faculty from the member institutions who have like interests, needs, or problems. Further, the steering committee must assist the faculty in "linking" their development styles. The process may be as simple as providing a place to meet or as complex as providing a process consultant to facilitate the activity. In the long run the faculty are responsible for the development process and activity. However, if someone does not link idea and action, it is likely that nothing will eventuate.

The second strategy is that of climate developer. Staff development activity requires an environment that is responsive to innovation and supportive of change. Yet, it is important that there be enough reinforcement of existing procedures and continuing ties to past practice to provide security. Through effective communication, organization of activity, integration of the regular and the ad hoc, and the provision of flexibility within structure, it is

possible to develop a climate that is secure yet responsive to change. The steering committee must draw upon the individual resources of the members from the campuses involved as well as the credibility of the entire group to bring an appropriate climate into being. The result is an entity that is greater than its constituents and, thereby, integration is enhanced.

The third strategy is that of information disseminator. The purpose of "spreading the word" is threefold. First, by keeping the faculty and staff of the participating colleges aware of what is transpiring, a climate responsive to staff development will flourish. Second, development is a faculty-based activity. A central component is peer recognition. It serves two purposes; it provides psychological gratification to participants and encourages non-participants to become involved. In effect, it keeps the machinery of innovation lubricated. The final aspect of information dissemination is the development of an identification with an entity beyond the individual college. The activities being disseminated are fostered by the consortium; awareness of that body and its role will further the process of integration.

The fourth strategy is that of insularity reducer. It is easy for small colleges in rural areas to "lose track of" the larger world. The steering committee through the judicious use of consultants, travel and the encouragement of specific types of projects, can insure that contact is maintained between everyday concerns and the issues which possess a global dimension. Further, contacts between existing programs within the

consortium and outside programs and personnel enrich the consortium colleges, making them more responsive to their constituencies. In effect, by reducing insularity in personnel and institutions, the consortium is reinforcing the importance of dynamic, responsive colleges.

The final strategy is closely related to insularity reducer. It is that of regional revitalizer. The Appalachian Regional Commission which funded the consortium challenged it to "make the maximum contribution toward revitalizing the development, management, and administration of (Appalachian) communities..."[5] The process involved is complex. Institutional renewal emanates from personal growth and development on the part of the personnel who comprise the institutions. Revitalization of the region requires dynamic institutions willing to engage the process of change. The steering committee must facilitate development of personnel that fosters both the renewal of the colleges and the revitalization of the region. The techniques involved include effective communication, long-range planning, resource development, and a system of assessment and evaluation. The final strategy is the most difficult and demanding. The consortium steering committee has entered into an extensive formative evaluation to determine the degree of implementation of this strategy.

Through the mechanism of the five strategies the steering committee seeks to manage the achievement of the goals of the consortium. Preliminary assessment indicates that progress is being made. What steps lie ahead?

Toward 1980

There is both a progression and an interrelationship between the staff development activities designed for individuals, institutions and consortia. If we are to see institutions become responsive to the concerns of the 1980's, we must begin by developing the potential of existing personnel, then fostering the interrelationship and encouraging the progression. The concept of staff development within the context of a consortium points the way to a process which can prove both effective and efficient. The management strategies adopted and implemented by the governing entity of the consortium will enhance or retard effectiveness and efficiency. The strategies sketched above would appear to focus on the former. Time is the test.

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